

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS

2021

McMASTER FAMILY HEALTH TEAM

Award: Community Response to COVID-19

Achievement: Creating COVID-19 Community Ward /COVID@Home Program



When modelling predicted an escalating number of COVID-19 patients in the local population for the second wave of the pandemic, McMaster Family Health Team (MFHT) mobilized quickly to design a system of dedicated care for these patients while continuing access to care for its regular primary care patients. As hospitalizations increased, the team realized that it would be important to support its patients, as well as the local hospital and the team's public health partners, making this COVID-19 Community Ward program even more valuable. In fact, Ontario Health was so impressed by the program that they adapted it for use across the province, where it has been rebranded the COVID@Home primary care program.

The program, designed by the team's clinicians to actively monitor COVID-19 patients at home, ensures prompt identification and escalation of care for those developing serious illness, while reducing the burden on hospital services from patients not needing hospital admission. The program involves structured risk assessment to determine monitoring intensity, provision of pulse oximeters and regular structured follow-up linked to an evidence-based pathway. The clinician monitors symptoms and vitals, and other social and psychological supports needed.

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Patients' input into their care is sought during each interaction. Caregivers, too, are often included in patient interactions with the team, who strive to keep them involved in the ongoing care with the patient's consent.

Today, McMaster's team of clinicians and researchers continue to actively monitor all new COVID-19 patients. The team's research co-ordinator reviews aggregate qualitative and survey data and helps guide care. They continue to meet weekly, discussing pertinent cases, updates and to scan for issues that need attention. The program is now an embedded part of their regular care without needing additional funding/resources.

Key Facts:

- Developed a proactive approach to addressing COVID-19 cases within the community: identifying patients who needed hospitalisation as early as possible while also helping maintain capacity in the hospital system
- Adapted by Ontario Health for use provincially - rebranded as the COVID@Home primary care program
- Since January 2021, more than 600 MFHT patients have had care through this pathway
- >90% of respondents to post-discharge survey have reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their care
- Team members lead weekly online sessions for Ontario clinicians implementing the program